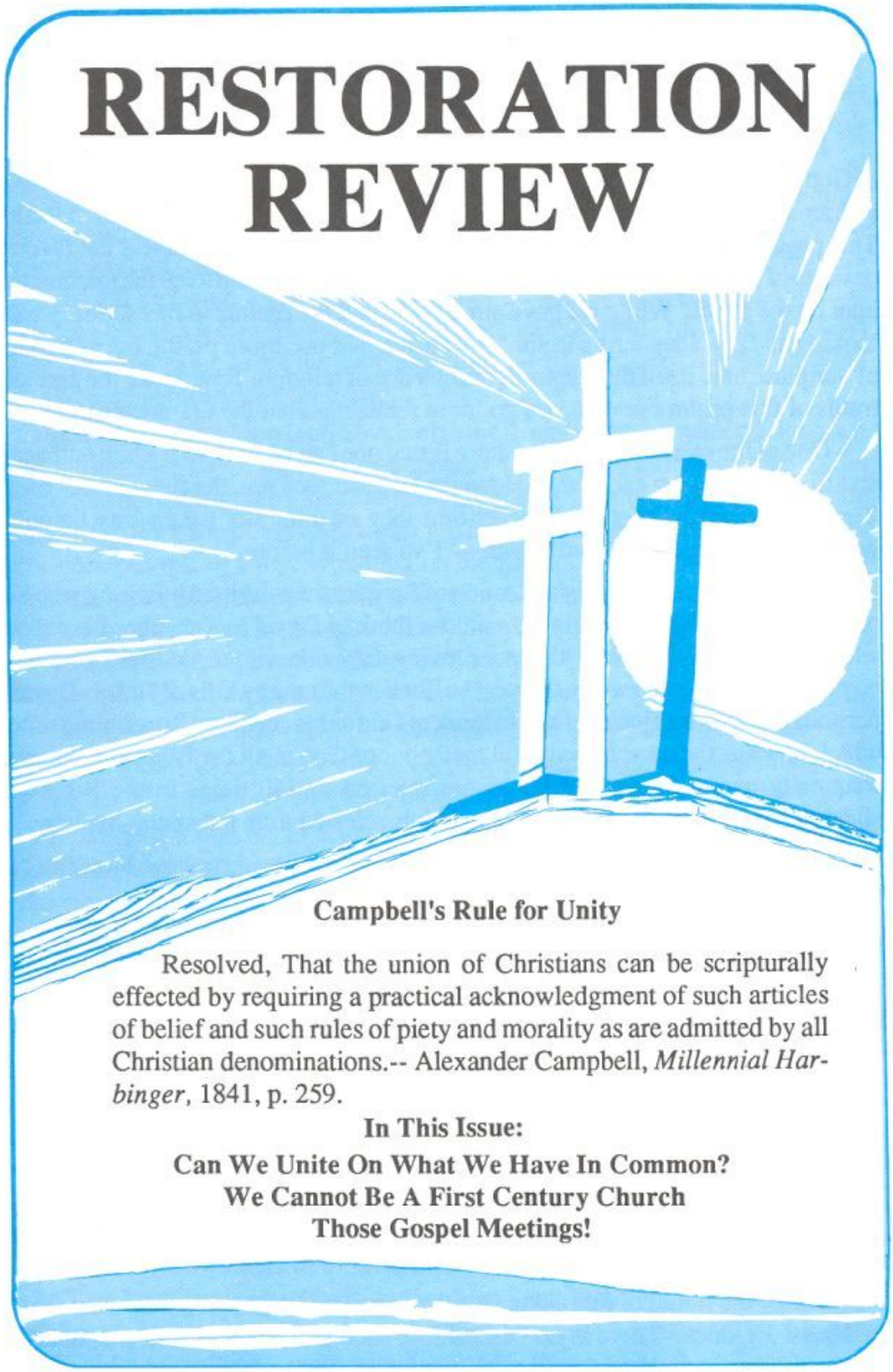
RESTORATION REVIEW



Campbell's Rule for Unity

Resolved, That the union of Christians can be scripturally effected by requiring a practical acknowledgment of such articles of belief and such rules of piety and morality as are admitted by all Christian denominations.-- Alexander Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger,* 1841, p. 259.

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Those Gospel Meetings!

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What the Old Testament Means to Us. . No. 11

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

In this series on what the Old Testament means to us we have seen that the grace of God is the overarching theme. In this installment I want us to see how God's grace is dramatically demonstrated in the Bible's most famous passage, the 23rd Psalm. This psalm is the centerpiece of all the OT, and it is unique in that it is the favorite passage of the Jew, Eastern Orthodox, Western Christian, and even the unchurched man on the street. While we have already studied the psalms in this series, we are looking at "The Shepherd's Psalm" not so much as one more psalm, but as a canon of Scripture unto itself that captures the essence of religion. If we make the gracious truths of this psalm our own, we go far in realizing what the OT means to us.

One of the marks of great literature is that one can go back to it again and again and find it refreshing each time. However familiar they are, the rich phrases of the 23rd Psalm yield deeper meaning each time they are turned to. Like a great painting, we can never turn away from it with a "I've seen it before."

It is significant that this short canon of Scripture was written by a king who had once been a shepherd. This is why we can think of David as a shepherd-king, one who ruled over his people with tender loving care, one who could look back to his boyhood days when he watched over the flock in the craggy hills of Judea. David's perilous life with his flock led him to think of God as his shepherd in troubling times, which gives us the most meaningful metaphor of God in all the Bible and the most frequently used. Sheep and lambs are referred to 340 times in the Bible and shepherds 80 times, and never are shepherds referred to in a disparaging way.

Among the references to God as a shepherd are these impressive lines from Is. 40:11:

> He will feed His sheep like a shepherd;
> He will gather the lambs in His arm,
> and carry them in His bosom,
>
> And gently lead those who are with young.

The first line of the 23rd Psalm is so familiar to us that we might miss the significance of the term shepherd. Its significance becomes clear when we try to substitute some other metaphor, such as "The Lord is my grocer" or "The Lord is my stock broker," which are grotesque. We might say "The Lord is my physician" because a physician like a

shepherd can be thought of as giving of himself to help those he serves. Or we could say "The Lord is my friend," and it is interesting that shepherd and friend come from the same root word in Hebrew.

One of the riches of this passage is that it states in a positive way what God is and what He does. There is no beseeching, such as, "Lord, be my shepherd" or

"God, please lead me beside still waters." Neither is David arguing that God does this or that. He is stating facts and glorying in them. This is the grace of God. David's life was stained by sin, but still he could look to God as caring for him just as he watched over his sheep. David was not all that good, but still God was with him when he walked through the valley of the shadow of death.

Too, this psalm is rich in emotion, which is so necessary to true religion. Religion must be of the head but it must also be of the heart. The feel of this psalm is in pronouns like! and *my.* Luther had a point when he said that the heart of religion is its personal pronouns. That glorious first line, "The Lord is my shepherd," is captivating because it gives us the security of belonging to God. I am as near to God and He is as near to me as are the lamb and its shepherd. He is *my* shepherd! What could be more comforting than that?

The feeling in the hymn is also evident in the tender scenes of pastoral life, such as the intimacy between sheep and shepherd. One shepherd in Palestine told a minister that he could identify his sheep blindfolded, by feeling of their faces. While sheep can see only a few feet, they never mistake the identity of their shepherd. A visitor once put this to a test by putting on the robe of the shepherd and walking among his sheep. At first they did not seem to notice, but the moment he spoke they fled in panic. That gives meaning to Jesus' likening himself to a shepherd in John 10: "My sheep hear My voice and they follow Me. But a stranger they will not follow but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers."

A stranger they will not follow. What pregnant words those are! If we stay close to our Good Shepherd we will not be led astray by the false values of this world, such as secularism and consumerism, however attractive their voices may be.

An old story comes out of Wales of two ministers who were vacationing in the Welsh mountains and came upon a shepherd boy attending his flock. The lad had been deprived of education and knew nothing of the Christian faith. The ministers taught him the 23rd Psalm, especially the first line. They went on their way and thought no more about it, but the next year when they returned for their vacation they chanced to call at a humble

cottage nestled in those same hills. When the lady of the house was serving tea she noticed that one of them was studying the picture of her son on the mantle.

They thought they might have met him, but she explained that it was unlikely since he worked as a shepherd back in the hills, and that he recently died from a fall on a cold night while attending his sheep. They told her the story of how they had met him the year before. She told them that there was something unusual about his death that they might be able to explain. He was clutching the third finger of his left hand, she told them. They then told her how they taught him to count off the five words "The Lord is my shepherd" on the thumb and fingers of his left hand, and noted the significance of the fourth word, "The Lord is *my* shepherd." The shepherd boy was holding to the *my* when they found him frozen to death.

It is impressive how that third finger of the left hand in many cultures has come to stand for possession. The ancients believed that a nerve ran from that particular finger directly to the heart, the seat of affections. Women through the centuries have worn a ring upon that finger because the man of her life placed it there, saying, "She is mine." Can we, like that shepherd lad, hold that finger in our hour of trial with the assurance that we belong to the God of heaven and He belongs to us?

One need not travel far in the rugged and barren terrain of Palestine to marvel how David could ever have said, "I shall not want," if he depended upon that land for his sustenance. If it was "a land flowing with milk and honey" to ancient Israel, it was only as they compared it to the desert of Egypt wherein they had wandered for forty years. One can hardly find a more desolate place than the Sinai desert with its granite mountains and ever-drifting sand. Stones are everywhere, which may be why they are so frequently referred to in the Bible. It was an arduous task for a shepherd to find food sufficient for the sheep. But when David in his after-years reminisced on his years as a shepherd he could write, "I shall not want." it is one of the great affirmations of Scripture.

It was a matter of trust on David's part, which gets to the heart of what religion is all about. The God who commanded the ravens to feed Elijah in that same barren land would care for him as well, regardless of circumstances. I shall not want! While that assurance refers primarily to physical needs, it is a promise that relates to all of life's troubles. The problem for most of us is that we have never been in absolute want, and we tend to rely upon our own strength and resources. We know that in some parts of the world God's children are suffering from want, often because of famine. But God in His providence never allows famine to afflict all the world at the same time. Over all there is always enough for all God's people, if only we will share. It is crucial that we learn that life is a

family affair. When enough of us are controlled by the spirit of Christ there will be worldwide wellbeing.

Green pastures and still waters were scarce in the land where David worked as a shepherd. In fact there was no such thing as “a pasture” as we understand that term in the western world. The sporadic patches of green grass were scattered over the barren land, unfenced and unenclosed. It was difficult for the shepherd to find enough of these to sustain his flock, and there was always competition with other shepherds, who sometimes fought bitterly for a cool stream or a scrap of green. The shepherd, therefore, had to contend with wild men as well as wild beasts. So delicate was the balance between survival and extinction that the shepherd always slept near his flock, even when they were in a sheepfold.

All this adds poignancy to those majestic lines: “He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.”

The reference to lying down points to the fact that the sheep are comfortably fed and are relaxed. I recall seeing such scenes in New Zealand, where there are one million people and six million sheep. Until they have grazed sufficiently the sheep scurry about looking for luscious grass, which is no problem in New Zealand. But on most any hillside where one might see hundreds of sheep, there are those who are lying down, full and satisfied.

This is saying to us that we don’t have to worry, fret, and cope the way we do. God provides green pastures and still waters. He blesses us with our needs if not our wants, even when times are hard. For the Christian the ultimate green pasture and still water is Jesus, for he is the bread of life and the water of life, God forbid that we be starving sheep or a frightened flock when abundance and security are ours as the free gift of grace. If we know the voice of our shepherd, we will follow wherever he leads, whether over steep and rugged mountains or dark and precipitous valleys.

When David goes on to say “He restores my soul,” he is saying, as a British theologian translates it, “He brings me back from wandering,” which was a large part of the work of a shepherd watching after straying sheep. If a lost sheep lingered too long on another’s land it became the property of another shepherd. Too, a wandering lamb or sheep was vulnerable to wild beasts. This reality of pastoral life led Jesus to liken a wandering sinner to a lost sheep. One lost sheep has such value to the shepherd of a hundred sheep that he will leave the ninety-nine and search for the lost one, our Lord noted. And when he finds it he greatly rejoices. God is like that, Jesus is saying, for when a lost sinner is brought back the angels of heaven rejoice. That is what “He restores my soul” means. Like

David's sheep we are always nibbling ourselves lost, but our Shepherd-God always brings us back.

Here we have an important part of what the OT means to us. It reveals to us a God who not only has the tender loving care of a shepherd, but one who even pursues us in our foolish wanderings. What an impressive truth it is that it is not the sheep that finds the shepherd but the shepherd that finds the sheep. If we love God, it is because He first loved us. We didn't choose Him, He chose us. We can trust Him to do a Savior's work. This is why we must "try" less and trust more. It is more by yielding than by trying that our souls are continually refreshed. While Paul could say, "I can do all things," he aptly added "through him who strengthens me." Jesus spoke a truth that has difficulty getting through to us in our "Do it yourself culture—"Apart from Me you can do nothing."

There are other goodies in the 23rd Psalm that underscore what religion in the OT is about. These we will study in our next.—*the Editor*

> While we live our life here on earth, so long as we live it "with" him, and allow him to live it "with" us, then we experience the deep joy, satisfaction and security that the sheep knows in the presence of its good shepherd.—*George A. F. Knight*

CAN WE UNITE ON WHAT WE HAVE IN COMMON?

By the time Alexander Campbell was thirty years into his work as a reformer he was having second thoughts as to the basis upon which all Christians could be united. In 1839, when he was 52, he began a series of essays in his *Millennial Harbinger* on "Christian Union," in which he referred to his earlier writings on the subject. While he had always had a passion for the subject, he notes, it was some time before he could "clearly see the ground on which all true Christians could form one visible and harmonious union, and cordially co-operate in a common salvation."

Those words in quote sum up the Stone-Campbell movement. It was a movement to unite the Christians in all the sects. Its earliest documents were unity documents, and the Stone and Campbell movements, at the outset separate efforts, themselves became one unity movement in 1832. As Robert Richardson, the movement's first and most reliable

historian, said, “This movement was born of a passion for unity, and unity has been it consuming theme.”

It is noteworthy that thirty years after his father had published *The Declaration and Address*, which may be thought of as the movement’s *magna carta* for unity, and he himself had written extensively on the subject, Alexander Campbell said that in those earlier years he did not “clearly see” the ground for unity. He was referring to his *Christian Baptist* days, published from 1823-1830, and such essays as “A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things.” In reading that material one might not conclude that Campbell had a clarity problem, not in his own mind at least, but he would conclude that Campbell saw unity as predicated upon restoring “the ancient order” as he perceived that order.

By 1839 he was writing a new series on unity in which he criticizes his earlier views as not yet crystallized. It says something for an editor that he can change his mind or at least modify his views. It not only indicates an honest search for truth but a man who is on the growing edge. Would that his tribe increase among today’s editors!

Too, in his more mature years Campbell was less caustic toward “the sects.” In his 1839 series he calls for “a congress of all Protestant parties,” and if anyone wants to invite the Greek and Roman sects he would vote for it. Once representatives from all the sects are gathered, he goes on, a “rule of union” should be set forth for their consideration, to wit: “Whatever in faith, in piety, and morality is catholic, or universally admitted by all parties, shall be adopted as the basis of union.” He adds, “and whatever is not by all parties admitted as of divine authority, shall be rejected as schismatical and human.”

Campbell concluded his essay by asking all lovers of Christian union to consider his proposal. History indicates that even Campbell’s own people have not given this proposal the attention it deserves. We can unite upon the things we all hold in common, upon catholic principles! The things that we disagree on will be considered opinions and not made terms of unity and fellowship. Even within our own movement we have failed to catch Campbell’s vision. I for one am persuaded that when Campbell made catholicity the rule of union he set forth the only possible way that all believers can be united. We certainly cannot unite upon our differences, and if we wait until all the differences are ironed out we will always be divided.

Campbell’s proposal was a stroke of genius, and yet so simple and workable that one would suppose it would often be heard in ecumenical circles. But ecumenical leaders have a way of being abstruse in their sincere but complex proposals for oneness among Christians. As for the rest of us we are so caught up in our differences that we appear to be blind to the fact that Christians agree far more than they differ.

In my recent visits to all the 70-odd churches in my home town that was the one fact that impressed me the most, that we all have far more in common than we have been willing to admit. Campbell proposed unity on those commonalities.

Campbell's magnanimous proposal was not ignored by John T. Johnson, "the evangelist of Kentucky" he was called, and who more than anyone else was responsible for the union of the Stone and Campbell forces back in 1832. Nine years later, in 1841 and in the same city of Lexington, Ky.,Johnson called such a gathering as Campbell proposed. In issuing an invitation to all parties, he announced: "As the union of Christians is most desirable, being of eternal importance, the great object will be to ascertain the scriptural bond of union, in order to its accomplishment."

A large audience assembled for the affair on April 2, 1841. Dr. James Fishback, a Baptist, and Alexander Campbell were the main speakers. In Campbell's address he set forth his "rule for union" that he had proposed two years earlier, but in these words this time:

> RESOLVED, That the union of Christians can be scripturally effected by requiring a practical acknowledgment of such articles of belief and such rules of piety and morality as are admitted by all Christian denominations. (*Mill. Harb*., 1841, p. 259)

The large assembly unanimously approved the resolution. They also approved of a second resolution that made the Bible and the Bible alone as the sufficient foundation on which all Christians may unite. They found no problem in coupling those resolutions, for it is the Bible and the Bible only that sets forth the universal principles upon which believers can unite. There is no suggestion that every doctrine referred to in the Bible would have to be seen alike, for it is generally conceded that this is impossible.

In Dr. Fishback's address he dealt with the differences that those in the assembly held in reference to baptism: "There is scriptural ground for an honest difference of opinion among the sincere disciples and followers of Jesus Christ, laid in the weakness and imperfections of man, and that they ought not disown one another at the Lord's table as Christians on account of their difference."

Campbell apparently agreed with this, for he hailed the speech as one of the finest he ever heard and wanted it printed and distributed widely. The rule of catholicity as the basis of unity forces us to allow for differences on baptism. The "one Lord, one faith, one baptism," which Campbell often named as a summary of catholicity, are agreed to by virtually all Christians, though they may differ on how these are appropriated. While it is

true that all believers may concede that immersion is the one mode that all could properly agree to, it has been too controversial for too long for this to be immediately effected.

Only by allowing for differences on baptism will unity ever be possible, but that does not mean that we cannot and should not, in a united church, bear witness to what we believe about baptism by immersion for the remission of sins. But while doing that we can accept as equals in Christ those who do not see it the way we do. This does not call for us to approve of anything we believe to be wrong or LO surrender any truth we hold. We can accept one as an equal in Christ without approving of all he may believe and practice.

The heart of the rule of union is that we all be committed to the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is Lord! This is the basis of our faith, and it is the only creed the early church had. All who sincerely follow him the best they know how, faithful and obedient according to their understanding, are Christians. We all agree that what God requires is “love mercy, do justly, and walk humbly with God,” but we will differ on particular applications of such principles, such as the question of a just war, euthanasia, abortion, genetic engineering, etc., etc.

Campbell wanted his people to think about and talk about his proposal. Can we unite, even among ourselves, on the things we agree on? Unless we hold things like Sunday schools, cups for Communion, instrumental music, societies and agencies, inerrancy, millennial views, etc., etc. as essentials to the catholic or universal faith (The church everywhere, for instance, would have to be acappella to be a true church), then we can accede to Campbell’s resolution. “In essentials (universals) unity, in opinions (subordinate doctrine) liberty” has always been our plea. Is there really any other way to unite?

Thomas Campbell anticipated his son’s rule for union when he wrote the first proposition for his *Declaration and Address:* “The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally and constitutionally one.” But when he penned those words in 1809 there wasn’t a congregation on earth that he could call his own. Where was that church? He answered that in his next line, “consisting of all those everywhere who profess their faith in Christ and obey him in all things according to the Scriptures.” This is the church catholic, preserved in truth—universal truths.

That church always has been since the Holy Spirit breathed it into existence and always will be until Christ comes to claim it as his own.

It is those truths centered in Jesus Christ that make us one. Nothing else will, nothing else can. So, Thomas Campbell scored a point that most of us still have not grasped. The church is already one and cannot be other than one by its very nature, and all who are part of it are united in Christ and with one another in the Spirit.. Factions, divisions, parties

fasten themselves like leeches upon that church, but they cannot destroy it or its unity. The gates of hades shall never prevail against it, for it is one, holy, apostolic, and catholic.—*the Editor*

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We Cannot Be A First Century Church...

WHAT MUST THE CHURCH OF CHRIST DO TO BE SAVED? (11)

Hanging about the neck of the Church of Christ like an albatross all these years has been the fiction that we are the first century church duly restored in name, organization, worship, doctrine, and practice. It is a fiction grounded on false assumptions, such as the church of the apostles having a particular name, which it did not, and that it had a uniform organization and clearly-defined "acts" of worship, which it did not.

But the first thing we must come to terms with if we are to rid ourselves of the weighty albatross is a proposition that can hardly be questioned: *We can't be a ftrst century church!* There is no ground for supposing that God ever intended for His church in each succeeding century for the past 2,000 years to be a first century church, even if it were possible, which it isn't. That one simple fact, duly accepted and acted upon, would go far in saving the Church of Christ, to wit, *that it* is *impossible to be a first century church in the 21st century.*

The evidence rather suggests that God calls us to do for our generation what the primitive church did for its generation. Nothing in Scripture indicates that the earliest congregations were intended to be models for all time to come or even in their own time for that matter. The facts of history, culture, and civilization demand that the Church of Christ of the second century would be a second century church and that the church of the sixteenth century would be a sixteenth century church. Each generation of Christians is to serve its own time, drawing upon both holy Scripture and the experience of the church through the ages (tradition) for its direction. We have to recognize that time makes a difference in the way Scripture is to be interpreted.

All these years we have suffered from the illusion of a golden age of the church in the past. Historical study has exploded this illusion, for we now know there was never a golden age, not even in the case of the earliest churches which had problems as serious as those of most any other period. We have what one of our pioneer preachers, Walter Scott,

called “the golden oracle,” which referred to the grand truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but we have had no golden age. The fact that the primitive church had many diverse elements, both Jewish and Gentile, and only gradually emerged from its Jewish context to have a character of its own makes any golden age interpretation impossible. The church has always in every generation been far less than perfect.

We have erred in our claim that there is a uniform pattern of organization and worship in the New Testament churches and that we have duly “restored” that pattern. This is evident in the fact that we can’t even agree among ourselves as to what that pattern requires. We have not only differed but divided over almost every aspect of the life of the church, whether it has to do with using instruments of music, missionary and benevolent societies, Sunday schools, the manner of serving Communion, cooperative efforts, work of elders and preachers, etc., etc. Are we to conclude that God has given us a prescribed norm or pattern that is so obscure that we ourselves cannot make head or tail of it? Or is it that we have erred in making the New Testament something that it never has been and was never intended to be?

There are three fallacies that we have succumbed to as a result of presuming that we are to be a first century church in the 20th and 21st centuries. A close look at them may help us to free ourselves from them.

1. *That the silence of Scripture on any proposed new method* is *equivalent to a denial of its legitimacy.*

It is interesting that Alexander Campbell in his earlier years was misled by this fallacy. When a new method of doing the church’s work was proposed to him, he retorted with, “It is not commanded.” Experience taught him that the “silence” argument confines the church to centuries past and makes useful innovations impossible. By 1849 Campbell was ready for his congregations to pool their efforts in an organized missionary society and he served as its first president. He was by now asking different questions about a proposed innovation, such as whether it is in harmony with the plain teaching of Scripture, whether it is in keeping with the Spirit of Christ?,” and whether it will promote the cause of Christ in our age?”

Today we live in a telstar, computerized age, and we can hardly imagine what the next century will bring. But we know that human nature will not change and that because of humankind’s fallenness people will always be in need of redemption. That is why we have an unchanging gospel that transcends all time. But means and methods will change, as will traditions and marginal and secondary matters. With the passing of centuries we have learned that many things are legitimate that are not specifically prescribed in Scripture,

such as buildings and baptistries. It should not be a question of whether a helpful innovation is prescribed but whether it is proscribed.

2. *That the true church must be an exact copy of the original church in all its details.*

In this proposition, which has had great influence upon Churches of Christ, there is more than one fallacy. The first is the fiction that there is such a thing as "the true church," if one means by that a church that is right about everything. There has never been such a church, including the ones set up by the apostles. One only needs to read about the congregations in the New Testament to see how imperfect they were.

The second false premise is that the "the original church" can be identified with such detail that an exact copy can be produced in succeeding centuries. Not all that many details are known and they differ from church to church. And even if the exact details could be ascertained, are we sure we should follow all of them? Do we want to be an exact copy of the Church of Christ in Jerusalem where each member sold his and her possessions and resorted to communal living? Or the church in Corinth where some believed in "lords many and gods many," where there were factions, and where they even practiced pagan rites in being baptized for the dead? If we sought to be like the church at Pergamus we could probably do without the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, whatever that was. And we wouldn't want to be "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" like the congregation at Laodicea.

When theologian Karl Barth was asked about how to identify a true church, he said that a true church is where the power of Christ is present in the lives of the people. That is a better answer than the illusion that we are "an exact copy" of some "original pattern" that never existed to begin with.

3. *The demand for book, chapter and verse for what is only improvements in modern culture.*

The church should be the first to make use of the modem technology that has given us a world of instant communication. Fax machines and computers now do what would have appeared miraculous only a few years back, and we travel about the world at incredible speed. The church is to capture such a world for Christ rather than to isolate itself into a first century (or even a 1940's) mentality. We must not allow ourselves to be held back by those who demand book, chapter and verse for the use of an overhead projector or any other means, great or small, that furthers the cause of Christ.

I belong to a Church of Christ that not only has duplicating machines and computers but a workroom with all sorts of gadgets and teaching aids, spacious offices and reception rooms, a family activity center (with kitchen, stage, basketball court, etc.), a gazebo out in

the garden, a prayer room, etc. Committees oversee mission projects at home and abroad, Meals on Wheels, campus ministry, youth ministry, and many more. Imagine a Church of Christ with a prayer room and a prayer ministry, with call-in recorders and all the rest! One thing is sure, we are not a first century church! The paved parking lot with hundreds of high-powered automobiles makes that evident.

Our response to the demand for a changing church in a changing world should be a blend of common sense and vital piety, which does not call for a Bible verse for every modem innovation. The question ought to be whether all such things are in keeping with the Spirit of Christ, whether they are a proper use of financial resources, and whether they are used to the glory of God. The rule should be to use things and love people, not the other way around. That means we will use such things in order to be a servant church rather than a self-serving church. So, the church of every age since apostolic times should say to the world around it, “We are your servants for Jesus’ sake,” but ways of doing this will change.

What then is “the pattern” for the church of the 21st century. Ever since the light shined in the darkness and the darkness could not apprehend it the pattern for God’s community on earth has been the same, Jesus Christ our Lord. According to 2 Cor. 3:18 it is his image that we behold as in a mirror, and it is his likeness that we, his church, are being conformed to, from one level of glory to another, and this by the Holy Spirit within us. Jesus Christ is the church’s pattern, and to the extent that the Bible shows us how to take on his likeness it may be referred to as our pattern. The Bible is our guide in that it reveals Jesus Christ.

We are thus to take the Scriptures in hand in order to see Jesus, for “they testify of me,” as Jesus himself put it in Jn. 5:39. That verse teaches us that we are not to be like the Pharisees who supposed that in the Scriptures themselves they had eternal life. If we liken the Bible to a telescope we are not to be like a monkey that looks *at* the telescope, but we are to look *through* the telescope in order to see the Person who is our pattern.

No one congregation in the New Testament therefore can be viewed as our pattern, nor all of them together, but out of their experiences, their strengths and weaknesses, we learn how to be his church. Out of the documents that we call the New Testament “the essentials” of the faith emerge and they become our norm for all generations, for it is the essentials that point us to Christ.

The gospel of the grace of God is forever, as are the ordinances of that gospel. Means, methods, and secondary matters, which are effected by cultural change, will vary with the generations. This calls for a responsible handling of Scripture by the church of every age

lest we cling to the Book itself and lose sight of the Person.—*the Editor*

The unexamined life is not worth living.—*Socrates*

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IN A COUNTRY CEMETERY

I was up early on the morning of 30 November as usual, preparing for my two-mile run down Windsor Drive. Checking on Mother Pitts as I always did, I found her halfway out of bed, as if she had tried to get up, and she was having another of her hard-breathing attacks. Ouida and I transferred her to her lift chair, giving little thought to her breathing problem since she frequently had them and always rallied once we changed her position. But this time she did not rally. Her granddaughter who is a nurse and who was visiting with us for Thanksgiving came in a few hours later and told us Mother Pitts was dying.

But Ouida and I had seen this before and we could not believe that she was dying. Once when she was that way we called her doctor, and he thought she was dying. That was 18 months ago! And sure enough she appeared to rally this time as the day progressed. But at 9:30 that night while I was in bed reading Ouida came to me and told me that Mother Pitts had quit breathing. I hurried to her side and sure enough she was gone. We gathered around her bed and thanked God for the beautiful life she had lived.

She chose a good time for her home going, for every Thanksgiving her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren gather at our home so they can be with her as well as each other. Their visit over, they were preparing to leave, but when her condition grew critical, they stayed awhile longer and were with her when she died. The funeral director observed that it is rare these days for an aged person to die with three generations gathered around her bed. More often than not, he noted, they die alone in a hospital or a nursing home.

Already aware of the procedure to follow, we summoned her doctor, who is also a dear friend and a Christian brother, who pronounced her dead and reported the death to the county coroner. Then we called the funeral director with whom Ouida had already made arrangements. He came personally, along with his son who shares the business, and was very solicitous and sensitive to Ouida and her kin.

The body, well covered and secured to the stretcher, was born out into the dark night. As Ouida and I stood at the open door watching, the funeral director called back to us reassuringly, “We’ll take good care of her.” Mother Pitts was gone. While we knew it had to came and needed to come, it seemed unreal after almost ten years.

We were all in our places in church the next morning. It was announced that Ouida’s mother had died during the night and that there would be only a graveside service at the old family cemetery near Athens, Texas on Monday. No one in Denton would be expected to be present since they did not know her. I already had the obituary prepared for the local paper. Word was sent to her old church in Athens so that her few surviving friends could attend the graveside service. She outlived most of her friends and kin. She was 95.

On Monday fifteen of us in four cars drove along together to Athens 120 miles southeast of Denton to the Willow Springs Cemetery, where we gathered with about that many more of her old friends and kin. Ouida and I were at this quiet country cemetery the year we married for her father’s funeral. Mr. Pitts had been waiting 47 years for his wife to be buried beside him!

It was a simple service that was cut even shorter than planned due to the cold. We were huddled in a tent erected for us by an Athens funeral home. One of the grandsons, now a father of two, gave the eulogy, which he made a joyous occasion. He told how the night before they had all gathered around the diningroom table at Aunt Ouida’s house and reminisced about grandmother, including fun things, and how they had done a lot of laughing, which he thought was appropriate. He told how Aunt Ouida once got in trouble with a visiting Church of Christ preacher. Ouida, then a teenager who wanted to be with a visiting cousin more than prepare for a visiting preacher, told anyone who was willing to listen that she wished that preacher wasn’t coming.

Her little brother, who grew up to be a captain in the Navy, heard what she said and found occasion to make appropriate use of it once the preacher was on the premises for Sunday dinner. “Brother Metcalf, you know what Ouida said about you, she said she wished you weren’t coming for dinner.” Ouida’s younger sister, always ready to come to Ouida’s defense, spoke up and said, “Brother Metcalf, Ouida didn’t say that, Mother did!” That filled the funeral tent with heany laughter, which somehow seemed in order.

I said only a few words at the end, to the effect that Mother Pitts had had an adventurous life. Childhood and school were adventures, as were being a wife and a mother, but in death she had embarked upon life’s greatest adventure. And it was a joyous adventure in that she was not leaving home but going home, and that death is not the end of life but its beginning.

There were some special moments during Mother Pitts' last hours. On the day before she died her grandson Mike Wrinkle, who spoke at graveside, and I sat down beside her and thanked her for being a blessing to us through the years. Mike recalled his boyhood days when she regaled him and his sisters with stories and set an example for them in old-fashioned values that will always influence his life for good. Mother Pitts was responsive enough to thank him for his kind words. She may not have been as aware when, on the day she died, Ouida, her sister, and two granddaughters gathered about her bed and took turns thanking God for her long, exemplary life. They praised God for the beautiful life she had lived and that she was able to be a blessing to them and so many others.

It was such scenes as this that led Scotland's beloved poet Robert Bums to write:

"From scenes like these old Scotia's grandeur springs,
That makes her loved at home, revered abroad."
Princes and lords are but the breath of kings,
"An honest man's the noblest work of God:"
And certes, in fair virtue's heavenly road,

The cottage leaves the palace far behind;

It was when Ouida stood before the open casket and saw her mother for the last time that I witnessed one of the most moving scenes of my entire life. She reached out her hand and placed it on her mother's folded hands and said, "Goodbye, mother dear, we love you." It was not sad and there were no tears, but it was a magnificent moment of human drama that will forever be etched in my memory.

In that moment in a country graveyard beauty and goodness met in simple splendor. Ouida held the hands of the one who bore her and gave her life. Mother Pitts had told me how she had to nurture Ouida through years of childhood frailty. I thought of that as we stood there together and of how the roles were finally reversed, with Ouida caring for her in her old age, not unlike the way one would care for a baby, year after year.

In that meeting of folded hands, mother and daughter together who had invested so much of themselves in each other, I saw sheer human goodness. Unalloyed, undiminished goodness! If Calvin had seen what I saw in that moment he could have talked of human goodness rather than human depravity. Ah, if I were a poet I might capture its elegance in words! Or perhaps in parable. It seemed to say to me that this is what the kingdom of heaven is like.

To use my old metaphor once more, we no longer have to wait on the platform for the train to come for Mother Pitts. We often heard the train in the distance and prepared for her home going, but it would never stop for her. But the other night it pulled in, almost unexpectedly, and beckoned her aboard. We watched as it disappeared into God's tomorrow. She is free at last!—*the Editor*

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THOSE GOSPEL MEETINGS!

Cecil Hook

If you were converted thirty-five or more years ago, chances are that you "responded to the invitation" during a gospel meeting. During my childhood and the greater part of my life in the Church of Christ, the gospel meeting was a tried and true method of evangelism. Most of the additions were in response to the convincing messages of an imported preacher and the arousing invitation songs at those exciting gatherings.

That eagerly awaited annual effort was the highlight of the year. Before the days of air conditioning and buildings large enough to accommodate the crowds, the services were conducted outdoors where I grew up in West Texas. Through the years the duration of those efforts has shrunken from two or three weeks to two or three days, or none at all.

Other churches had revival meetings; we had gospel meetings. You do not read of revivals in the Scriptures, but you read about the gospel. Never mind that gospel was never used to describe a meeting. Never mind that the very persons we hoped to attract understood what a revival meeting was but might be unclear about a gospel meeting. But we gained a satisfaction in splitting that hair.

In the preceding remarks, I wrote of gospel meetings with supposedly evangelistic purposes. As I think back now, I question our understanding then of what gospel preaching and evangelism were. The Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ was like the third stanza of the song which is often skipped. The gospel gave way to doctrinal disputes and hobby-riding in our effort to convert the Baptists and Methodists to a different set of doctrines of our exclusive brand.

One night of each series was always devoted toward convicting others that instrumental music in worship would sent them to hell.

It seemed of vast importance that the sinner be convinced that the church began on Pentecost, not before or after. Jesus was necessarily mentioned, but the emphasis was on the church. Sometimes to head off premillennial thinking, a sermon labored to show the identity of the church with the kingdom, both being started on Pentecost, and both being the Church of Christ rather than the Baptist Church, the Methodist Church, or any other. Most of the preachers denounced other churches by name, often in scorn and contempt and with arrogant challenges.

There always had to be a lesson on the identity of the church—its founder, origin, terms of entrance, worship, work, organization, name, etc. showing that those marks identified our segment of the Church of Christ as the true church. Jesus got passing mention in contrast to Joseph Smith, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other such "false" teachers. Those lessons made it seem that salvation was dependent more in being in the rightly patterned organization than in a personal relationship with God in Christ.

I can still visualize those blackboard diagrams, which I also used for many years, depicting our concept of the original church, the foretold apostasy (obliteration of the church), the misguided efforts of the Reformation, and our restoration of the one true church. Of course, our segment of the splintered Restoration Movement was it!

No gospel meeting would have been complete without at least one effort to convince the sinner that faith was not enough to save but the declaration that works of obedience, primarily the five steps, was the gospel bringing salvation. The saving faith was made to be more a faith in right works than belief in Jesus as the Lord to whom one surrendered his life.

Our religious neighbors testified to having had saving experiences and the Pentecostals claimed gifts of the Spirit. This made it imperative that one lesson be given in ridicule of those claims and to convince all that the Holy Spirit completed his work 1900 years ago and left us the New Testament scriptures, and that through—that word alone he touches our lives and is in us, his temples.

Regardless of its subject, in each lesson baptism was emphasized. But that was not enough. One session had to be devoted to baptism to make sure that all listeners knew the purpose and mode of baptism and who were candidates for it, and to know their previous baptism was not to be trusted.

In most any discourse on any subject there were places where the insert key could be tapped to bring in points about baptism, faith only, instrumental music, or whatever the preacher was contentious about. He could inject these points selectively depending on who was in the audience.

Thinking back on the history of our rural congregation, I recall about a dozen men from it who became preachers or missionaries and half that number of women who married preachers or missionaries. I was among those who grew up under that sort of tutelage. We carried those unbalanced, misguided concepts in our various ministries. The lessons given in those meetings were the model for those delivered from the pulpit the rest of the time. We were all caught up in the reactionary preaching of our first decades of existence as a separate body. Fighting for our identity as a separatist group, we unwittingly turned the gospel of salvation into doctrinal disputes concerning the church.

It is with dismay that I recall having accepted that sort of format for my efforts. I had been taught it by the sincerest servants of God whose honorable names many of you would recognize, and its pattern had been imprinted in me almost indelibly. My painful review of these things here is not out of bitterness or to belittle God's servants. I would have us to see more clearly how our wrong emphasis laid a foundation for an exclusive group which depends more on right forms, doctrines, patterns and procedures than upon a personal belief in Jesus and a living relationship with him by faith. Such preaching reinforced our convictions of exclusiveness from all other Christian groups including the various splinter groups of the Church of Christ.

Perhaps you are protesting that we cannot have Christ apart from his church. You are correct, but being in the church is a result of accepting salvation in Christ. Salvation does not come from finding the right church. God adds the saved to it without their search for it. The Lord does not add all the saved to an exclusive, organized group. *We must not proclaim such a group as an element of the gospel of salvation!*

Those gospel meetings were not entirely devoid of the gospel. They were unbalanced. That is my point here. It was, and continues to be, a matter of misplaced emphasis. I am pleased that many in this generation are recognizing that problem. The church in change is correcting that misdirection.—*1350 Huisache, New Braunfels, Tx. 78130*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

On the second day after Thanksgiving Mother Pitts at last gave up the struggle and breathed her last. You might want to read the story I wrote about it in another part of this issue. She had absorbed so much of our lives for so long that it takes some getting used to not having her to care for. We were behind on so many things that we are just as busy as

ever trying to catch up. We are thankful for the tasks the Lord has given us and for the strength to do them.

The Door, a spunky journal that has a critical eye for what goes on in American churches, presents a Loser of the Month award to the church that pulls the biggest boner. A recent award went to the Sycamore Church of Christ in Cookeville, Tn. for spending nine million dollars on its "One Nation Under God" project, which was the mailing of "an eight-page comic book," as *The Door* described it, to 100 million American homes. The editor calls it a $9 million mistake, charging that the money could better be spent on things that really matter. The mail-out, one of the largest single mailings in U.S. postal history, may have been of "comic book" format, but it was an appeal to spiritual values. It offered the gospel of Christ as an alternative to materialism, drugs, violence, divorce, and pornography. But we concede *The Door* may have a point when it said, "Every time we see something like this we realize that revival does not need to come to the non-Christians in this country as much as it needs to begin with the Christians who have bought into the pagan belief that the best way to communicate the Gospel is by technology."

Some Roman Catholic leaders express concern that more than 100,000 Roman Catholics abandon their faith each year to join some sect. Many become Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, and even more become "Bible Christians." Thousands more drop out of religion entirely or become only "nominal Catholics." There is a para-church group known as Catholic Answers that is attacking this problem by holding hundreds of seminars in parishes across the country designed to strengthen Catholics in their faith and to answer doubts that might lead them astray. The ministry aggressively takes on all threats to "the Faith,"whether Mormonism or Fundamentalism. They distribute millions of tracts, flyers, tapes, and books, all designed to show Catholics how to defend their faith, which they confidently believe can be done. One of their mail-outs reads, "I don't want Catholics to be Fundamentalists!" I agree with them. I don't want Church of Christ/Christian Church people to become Mormons or Fundamentalists. I would not be enthusiastic about their becoming Greek or Roman Catholics, but I would delight in their becoming catholics!

Homer Matson, 13251 Jefferson High-way 99E SE, Jefferson, OR. 97352, has old copies of Mission Messenger, Restoration Review, and Macedonian Call that he will give away, but the recipient should pay the postage. Write to him if you are interested. Bob Lewis, 146 Country Manor Dr., DeFuniak Springs, FL 32433 has put five of Carl Ketcherside's books on five floppy diskettes for use on a hard disk drive. He will provide sets at cost and shipping, which is only $10.00. Write to him if interested.

As I write this column a new year approaches, a time for resolutions for some people. When friends ask me if! have a new year's resolution, I tell them yes, one that I make every year if not each day: "To know Christ more fully, to follow him more nearly, and to love him more dearly," which I borrow from a Scottish divine. This makes for other resolutions, such as being more sensitive to the pain of others, especially the deprived and dispossessed of the world, and those in our own midst who have about given up hope.

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READER'S EXCHANGE

I think you are stretching the point on the woman's place in the church. It seems accommodating to present trends without attention to some long held principles about male leadership. Can't women be treated with respect and serve God's church without being ''up front"? I love you.—*Chuck Dickens, Exeter, CA.*

I came into a Church of Christ from another church several years ago. One thing that impresses me about the Church of Christ is how men of all ages readily participate in all the services. It thrills me to see men teaching classes so willingly. In my previous church it was hard to find men who were willing and qualified to teach, and this was true of women as well. I am comfortable with the way things are in the Church of Christ, but it would be beautiful if women were given more opportunity for leadership and participation in the services, providing the men did not regress.—*Beth Cain, Lubbock, TX.*

I'll sure be sad to see this end.—*Bill Parker, Jasper,* IX.

Sad to know that you will soon cease publication. The paper has been a source of strength for me and many others, and a powerful force for change in what I am sure is a positive, truly Christian direction.—*Henry Boren, Chapel Hill, NC*

You have been such a blessing all through the years. I thank God that a young preacher gave me my first copy of your paper, It so changed my thinking and caused me to hunger for God that that same preacher soon initiated a withdrawal of fellowship from me. You have challenged my thinking many times. The paper will be sorely missed. I'm sure it has been a teacher and friend to many readers. Thanks also for sharing your overcoming victories and the daily care of Mother Pitts. The heavy loads we are called on to bear are not necessarily to make us better people but so that others may be encouraged in their trials when they see Jesus in us.—*Phylene Pressley, Maricopa, CA*

These words came to me out of the blue, as a golden, jeweled rod: "What you are is God's gift to you. What you become is your gift to God."—*Hubert Derrick, Huntington Beach, CA.*

As for what the Church of Christ must do to be saved, the first thing is to fall in love with Jesus. We need to love him enough to want to be like him. Most of us serve out of duty and for what we can get out of it, mainly to go to heaven. If there were no heaven, Jesus would still be worthy of our love. The second thing is to learn to worship.—*Renee and Jeff Sperry, Anniston, AL.*

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BOOK NOTES

Now that we have entered our last year of publication there will be an increased interest in our back issues, both bound volumes and loose copies. If you are interested in bound volumes, you might start with our most recent, *The Hope of the Believer,* which contains all issues of the paper for 1990-91, which is $15.00 postpaid. We have seven bound volumes in all, dating back to 1977, except 1979-80, and are available at $70.00 postpaid. These are handsome, matching volumes with dust jackets, introductions, and table of contents. Loose copies are 50 cents each, postpaid, while they last, and we have about 70 issues, some as old as the 1960's. Or we'll send you a random selection (by us) of 14 back issues for $5.00 postpaid.

Since our final issue will be in December of this year, all renewals from this point on will be for less than a year. Figure your renewal on the basis of 60 cents per issue. All new readers may subscribe for all of 1992 anytime during the year, and we will send the back issues they have missed at the time they subscribe.

There are two books just off the press that are critical (in a positive way) of the Church of Christ, the kind of self-criticism we need, coming as they do from within the church itself. One is *Endangered Heritage: An Examination of Church of Christ Doctrine* by Walt Yancey, an engineer who is a third-generation member of the Church of Christ. This is a revised edition of a hard-hitting book that challenges the church on its unique doctrines, especially our exclusivism and anti-instrumental music position. It quotes extensively from our pioneers, showing that we have been less than faithful to our heritage, thus the title. Now in soft edition and only $9.95 postpaid.

The other recently published book that calls the Church of Christ to account is *The Church In Transition* by James S. Woodroof, which says that we as a people have been unwilling to be a changing church in a changing world. It also says that it is imperative that we take our heritage as a unity people more seriously. It makes a strong appeal for unity in diversity and gives a helpful analysis of the Boston movement with which the author has had personal experience. It is encouraging that 700 of these books sold at the last ACU Lectureship. $7.95 postpaid.

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